



THE LIVING STANDARD – A BASIC INGREDIENT OF THE LIFE QUALITY

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Abstract *Living standard depends on the economic development level of every country, on the participation at the labour process, on the capabilities, abilities and the quality level of the carried out activities as well as on every person's position regarding the income sources. Though the two terms are much the same, the living standard is a basic ingredient of the life quality, so that the relation between the living standard and the life quality reflects the connection between a part and the whole.*

Keywords

Social-economic indicators, living standard, life quality, social-economic development, social welfare

1. Introduction

The living standard is an economic-social marker that expresses the satisfaction degree related to the general and specific needs of a certain population, community or of an individual, estimated through the people's amount of assets and services out of their incomes in a specific period of time, usually one year.

2. The Living Standard – a Basic Ingredient of the Life Quality

The living standard and life quality represent important ingredients of the economic development in human society and also a major influence on the social welfare. In order to understand this influence, an analysis of the living standard and life quality should be elaborated as these two concepts must be accurately defined. We may say that the living standard encompasses all the material, cultural and social elements the society provides to the whole community.

The limits of the living standard depend on the standard of the economic development in every country, on the participation to the labour process, on the capabilities, abilities and the quality level of the carried out activities as well as on every person's position regarding the income sources.

In order to characterize the living standard of a country the following elements must be taken into account:

- incomes level and development;
- level, development and structure of consumption;
- work-conditions;
- inhabitation conditions;
- population's health;
- level of people's education etc.

However, we are aware that the basis of a certain living standard is ensured by the economic development level of the country with the surveyed population, the GDP level and development and by the way it is shared to the people.

Ever since the 60's, the *living standard* concept has been associated to the *life quality* concept, which was launched in the Western countries aiming at the rapid growth of the welfare in the near future.

Therefore, the latter, life quality, encompasses the natural, technical, economic, social, political, cultural, ethical elements and others, leading to human integrity and biological, social and spiritual progress. At the same time, the life quality expresses the whole amount of the people's life conditions ensuring the integrity of the biological life, meeting the demands regarding socio-economic needs, the material and cultural standard, spiritual life as they all provide a strong balance of people's life and the completion of human personality.

“From a synthetic point of view, it may be considered that the scope of life quality is defined as the value of people's life, the way life conditions offer people the possibility to satisfy their multiple demands, the way people are satisfied with their lives” (Begu, 1999, p. 69).

“Analytically, the life quality may be defined as the number of physical, economic, social, cultural, political conditions of people's life, the contents and nature of their activities, the characteristics of the social relations and processes they participate to, the available goods and service, the adopted consumption patterns, the life-style, the assessment of the way the circumstances and results meet the people's expectations, the subjective

feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, happiness, frustration” (Begu, 1999, p. 69).

The life quality concept considers the way life conditions offer people the possibility to satisfy the most demanding needs, the way is quite satisfactory for people. Due to the life quality concept, one of the people’s fundamental issues is reconsidered, and that is happiness, having been defined as main element of philosophical thinking in ancient times. The life quality concept takes into account the relevant life characteristics for people’s happiness and this is its base. At the same time, the right to be happy is a fundamental right, and according to the European Union’s, it is valid for everyone with no discrimination.

The theoretical premise of the approach concerning the living standard and life quality relies on the following reasons:

- people are fundamentally different if we consider their needs and priorities;
- people may not have superior needs when the inferior ones are already satisfied;
- a larger number of people consider that strength is more important than intelligence.

In case we add people’s involvement in making decisions for society, the tense social relations, the elements connected to the social environment, we may discover another image of the two concepts- that of the equal chances within a society and they represent a new perspective of approaching the living standard and the life quality.

To have a more accurate image of the living standard and the life quality, the following principles should be taken into account:

- both concepts must be estimated beyond the assessment of an individual’s income and expenses, the size of the capital goods and they have to surprise and especially consider also those elements which cannot be evaluated in terms of money;
- in order to get a more accurate image of these concepts there should be compared different groups’ living conditions
- both concepts must be unitarily described, yet mentioning the different elements of specific fields, as there cannot be calculated an index of the living standard and life quality using a generally accepted method that enables the combination of different and opposite factors: income – health – work environment – social climate etc.

Beside these two terms we find another one - the life-style, referring to the way people organize their ordinary life at work, in their families, the civic life and the spare time, actually, their food, clothes, dwellings, their personal goals related to the system of important values and norms in the respective community.

Therefore, the living standard and the life quality are two concepts with a very synthetic and complex character, influenced by many social-economic factors, their evaluation being a highly important issue for the statistics of a country.

Although, at first sight, these two concepts – the living standard and the life quality – seem to be the same, they are quite different because of the scope.

The living standard is a main component of the life quality, whereas the latter has, conceptually, a wider scope than the former, as it additionally comprises the following:

- *quality of life environment* – individual’s relations with family, community and society;
- *quality of work environment* – the employee’s relations with the association, trade unions, the material and moral incentive;
- *quality of the educational, training and cultural system* – access to different educational levels, the population’s general educational level (the educational stock), access to culture;
- *quality of social and political environment* – social integration relations and the individual’s participation to the social and political decisions as well as his democratic conduct as a responsible person;
- *quality of natural environment* – people-nature relations, the ecological determination of individual’s life within the environment, taking into account the laws of nature.

A desired value of life quality is the collective welfare – in this special distribution of means and resources, all community members have access to a minimum amount of goods and services and this is the normal amount. Presently, countries pay careful attention to the collective welfare issue. In this respect, an agreement between the individual and collective preferences is imperative and it is necessary a comparison between the efficiency criteria and objectives and the equity and social justice ones. The living standard expresses the number of economic goods an individual or a group of people can afford of their income. The living standard may also be determined through quantifying elements of the life quality and the objective factor is the available income, its purchase power actually. Consumers’ reasons, depending on the habitat, are just subjective factors. The life quality depends on the harmonious and simultaneous satisfying all the people’s needs: civilized living conditions, social and economic security, health, spare time, culture, education, dignified, interesting and satisfactory work, positive inter-personal relations, an organized, free and democratic national society.

The concept “*life quality*” has a wider investigation scope than the living standard, approaching both the environment quality, demographic conditions, the quality of work conditions, of inhabitation, of health,

education and culture as well as the socio-political environment.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, the life quality comprises the people's material and cultural living standard as an organic component and the relation between the living standard and the life quality is a part –whole relation as the life quality conceptually includes the living standard.

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